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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the portfolio assessment system used in the master's degree program in educational leadership at San Jose State University, California. For the past 10 years students have demonstrated competence with a portfolio exhibition instead of written or oral comprehensive examinations. The five major concepts for the program reflect the faculty's best thinking about deeper understandings and habits of mind necessary for theory and practice in educational leadership. The themes are: (1) administrative concepts and management strategies; (2) the role of schooling in a democratic society; (3) building equity in divers communities; (4) managing and leading change; and (5) research and reflection on practice. The evidence that the student must present in the final portfolio must show deep understanding of the major concepts of the program through evidence in each concept from class discussions, courses, readings and texts, simulations, case studies, learning experiences with peers in and out of class, and the demonstration of the transfer of theory to practice at a work site or in the student's profession. The portfolio was introduced in the first course of this 2-year program and each course allows students time to build portfolios. The portfolio is also related to California's two-tier credential structure in school administration. (SLD)

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Background and Definition

The traditional dictionary defines a portfolio as "an itemized account" which could refer to a securities portfolio or the portfolio of a minister of state or the case in which an itemized account is transported, making it portable. In the world of high fashion, a model presents a portfolio of pictures so that he can be hired in advertising. An architect presents a sample of her buildings to a prospective client. Portfolios are the medium of choice by which many professionals display their skills. A portfolio is a work in progress as the person's skills and accomplishments develop from year to year.

In educational tests and measurement, a portfolio is "a systematic collection of one's work." (Popham, 1999, 181). Portfolios can be classified as working portfolios or exhibition portfolios. Many high schools and middle schools graduate students now by exhibition and portfolio as recommended in Horace's School, the basis for the nation-wide Coalition of Essential Schools. (Sizer, 1996). The use of portfolio assessment is not only appropriate to classrooms in K-12, but also in colleges. (Seldin, 1990).

For the past ten years, students in the two years' Master's degree program in educational leadership at San Jose State have demonstrated competency with a portfolio exhibition instead of written or oral comprehensive exams. There are three reasons for this: 1) the traditional written exam seldom tests any thing except rote memory; 2) the portfolio can be a working collection of student learning, course by course, over the two year graduate program; 3) the final exhibition portfolio can demonstrated competency in the program's concepts and or themes.

Concepts/Themes

In teaching and learning, one must first start with concepts or the major ideas within the discipline which promote deep understanding that will last beyond the details of the program or course. (Wiggins and MacTighe, 1998). These major concepts should form the basis of design for teaching and learning in planning an entire undergraduate or graduate program, in designing syllabi, and in designing assessment for student learning in the program as a whole.

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Educational Leadership faculty at San Jose State have worked with the original concepts or themes for the program over a ten year period. The faculty, using input from advisory boards, practitioners in the field, student evaluations of the program, experts in the field, and their own research and practice, have put program concepts or themes at the top of the agenda for the last two years as theory has expanded, practice has changed, and as new faculty are hired. The faculty, working as a long-range planning group, can discuss, design, and refine the major concepts and the deep understandings for their own program over a period of years.

The five major concepts for the program reflect the faculty's best thinking about deeper understandings and habits of mind necessary for theory and practice in educational leadership.

Major Concepts, Deeper Understandings, and Program Themes

The educational leadership master's degree has five unifying themes: Administrative Strategies and Management Concepts, Schooling in an American democracy, Building Equity in Diverse Communities, Managing and Leading Change, and Research and Reflection on Practice.
The curriculum for the program is constructed around student learning in those five concept or theme areas in class and in the practical applications on the job. All of the 500 students in the graduate program work full time in schools and districts, so the practical application of theory discussed in class is immediately applicable at their worksites. The portfolio is intended to capture how the theory learned in class is transferred to practical reality on the job. It also requires that students reflect on theory into practice in their writing which introduces each section of the final exhibition portfolio.

Habits of Mind

As we adopted the five themes or concepts for the Educational Leadership program, we also designed Habits of Mind with questions that students should continually ask themselves as they prepare the evidence of competency in their final portfolio exhibition.

1
PASSION
How do I take risks and display courage?
How do I demonstrate my educational passion in pursuing this work?
How committed am I to moral and ethical leadership when challenged with something difficult?

2
OWNERSHIP
How do I change my work and the work of my colleagues and community into our work?
How do we build teams?
What biases do I or others bring?
What do we need to accomplish this work successfully?

3
CONNECTION
Who benefits from this work?
How is the work relevant to addressing prejudice and -isms?
How can I draw from my own value system to promote social justice?
How can individuals and groups add influence to the work and how do I engage them?

4
REFLECTION
How has what I have done influenced my thinking and practice?
How does this work reflect my moral and ethical leadership?
In what ways have I shown scholarship?
How do I cope with stress – mine and others?
How does my work further excellence in education in an American democracy?
What further questions can I pursue?

Evidence

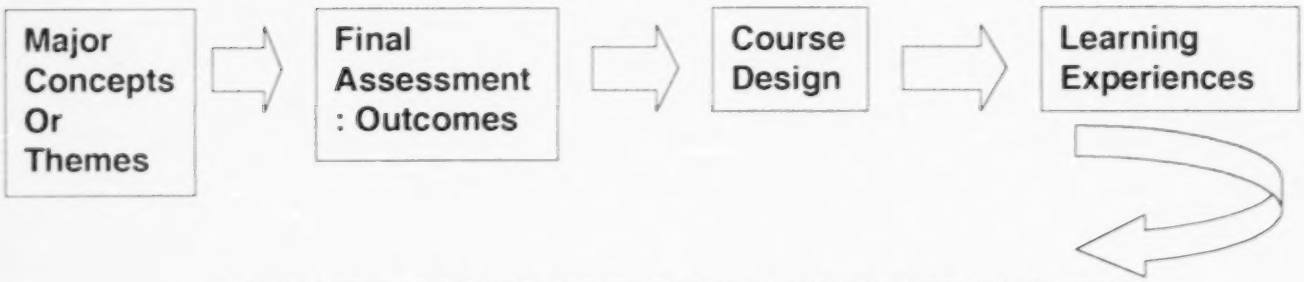
After a faculty has constructed teaching and learning around major concepts and deep understandings, how do they design courses and assessment that show evidence that the student has mastered the concepts or reached deep understandings?

If the faculty believe that these deep understandings or concepts are best assessed by answers to questions and written exams, the final assessment for the program will drive the design of courses in one way. If, however, the faculty believe that deeper understandings of the program's major concepts are best assessed by the student's own evidence, then the final assessment should be support outcomes and be a portfolio or other exhibition of the student's learning. Designing the final assessment as an exhibition portfolio demands that individual courses in the program be constructed towards teaching and learning major concepts or program themes. The final assessment design should be the

second step after deciding upon major concepts because those two steps will determine course syllabi and individual assessment for the program's courses.

State and national standards for the profession are bulleted under each of the programs major themes or concept.

The steps in designing final assessment for the program are these:



The evidence that the student must present in her final portfolio is part of constructivist learning. The student must show that she has the deep understanding of the major concepts of the program by her evidence in each concept from class discussions, courses, readings and texts, simulations, case studies, learning experiences with colleagues and peers in class and outside of class, and how she transferred the theory in a college or graduate course to practice at the work site or in her chosen profession.

Each piece of evidence is categorized under one of the program's major concepts or themes. The student's own reflection on the meaning of that concept and how theory was translated into practice is the introductory written reflection or essay on each of the program's major concepts.

The student's construction of the portfolio:

1. Major concepts or themes of the program
2. Evidence of theory into practice
3. Reflective essay to introduce each concept or theme

The Portfolio

The final assessment of the major concepts of the program. The portfolio is introduced in first graduate course of this two year program and each course thereafter allows students time to build the portfolio with reflective writing on each

of the five themes, readings, class discussion, simulations, case studies, and practical application of the theory. Thorough discussion by instructors and students allows students to own the portfolio and consider it a natural function of their own development instead of an add-on or superfluous appendage such as a written final exam. In each course, examples of reflective writing and application level samples are discussed. Appropriate samples for the portfolio and criteria by which students select samples or evidences of competency are discussed. Students are also involved in development, fine tuning, and creating rubrics by which the portfolios are evaluated.

Self-Assessment

As part of the process of constructing an exhibition portfolio to demonstrate competency, students engage in a self-assessment of skills and knowledge at the beginning and again at the end of the two year graduate program. We have used several types of self-assessment: the Pajaro rubric, the SJSU Administrative Self-Assessment, and NASSP's Leaders for the 21st Century Assessment. Students are critically honest in their self-assessment. The students take it very seriously indeed because it can eventually be tied to future hiring and performance evaluations. The results help them form a strong collaboration with their professors to build their strengths in weak areas.

Collaborative Learning

This collaborative learning is learning constructed by the student and the professor to gain skill and knowledge in the student's challenging areas. The student has other assistance in collaborative learning. In addition to the professors who teach courses, each student has a SJSU advisor, a professional mentor, a coach, and a supervisor at work. Periodic meetings with these scholar/practitioners make each student's work an individualized plan. The student also has support groups of colleagues in the cohort who meet regularly and share experiences to solve problems.

Each student also designs and conducts an action research project to solve a problem at the school. Data are collected, interventions are tried, and conclusions are reached. This project spans the two year graduate program. Each action research project must include collaborative learning with the school team, a district expert, and teachers within the school for a successful design and implementation. The action research project becomes a major part of the student's portfolio, demonstrating competency in research and its practical application.

The construction of the portfolio becomes a well-designed exhibit which starts with the student's self-assessment and concludes with how the student has

grown and developed in each area. No two portfolios look the same nor should they.

The Portfolio in Educational Leadership

The State of California has a two tier credential structure in school administration: (1) the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential which takes two years at the graduate level and (2) the Professional Administrative Services Credential which usually takes from one year to two years at the graduate level. All educational leaders must hold at least the Preliminary Services Credential.

Tier 1

In the Tier 1 graduate program, all students take courses in the school manager, the school leader, the educator, school human resources administration, school fiscal and legal leadership, the leader in the community and advocate for all children. The manager and leader are the introductory courses in which all students participate in a self assessment of their current administrative knowledge and skills. The Portfolio Personal Assessment is an assessment of skills and California competency standards and serves as a broad criterion reference base from which to measure student growth and readiness for receiving Preliminary Credential Status. Students rate their initial level of competence upon entering the program against the level they have obtained upon exiting from the program. This pre and post assessment is included in their Portfolio. Collaboration among the student, the university advisors, and the work supervisor promote the student learning in the challenging areas identified in the self assessment. Monthly meetings are conducted by the university advisors and professors with the student and the work supervisor to monitor goals and objectives and seek solutions to problems at work or help the student transfer class theory to on the job practicality.

Throughout the two year program in each of the students' classes, students are encouraged to save exhibitions of their accomplishments that demonstrate competencies in the five theme areas: Administrative Concepts and Management Strategies; The Role of Schooling in an American Democracy, Building Equity in Diverse Communities, Leading and Managing Change, and Research and Reflection on Practice. In the Portfolio, a brief written summary should be included of how this exhibition demonstrates the student's competency in one of the particular theme areas.

For the administrative interns, at least one of the exhibitions should include a discussion of a specific administrative challenge they had to face in their work place. They must describe the problem or opportunity, illustrate

solutions that they considered, discuss the steps they actually took and relate the knowledge and skill they learned in their course work to their actions, assess the degree of success and reflect on what they learned through meeting the challenge.

A final conference is held at the end of the two years of the graduate program. The student presents the final Portfolio and explains the selection of evidence for each of the major concepts or themes of the program. The university advisor and the work supervisor ask questions and examine the work closely, but not at the intense level for an oral defense of a doctoral dissertation. The university advisor, the professors for each course, the student, and the work supervisor have been part of the collaborative learning team throughout the student's two year program. At this time, there should not be any surprises in the final assessment of competency. It should be an exhibition of the student's competence in each of the five major concepts or themes in the program.

Tier 2

In California, students must enroll in a second two year program in order to be fully credentialed as school administrators. The portfolio is also used as the final assessment in Tier 2. Major concepts, final assessment, course design, and learning experiences also drive faculty discussion for this program.

In Tier 2, students take courses in change theory, standards and assessment, cultural diversity, and the politics of education. In the introductory course (270), students participate in self-assessment, using the California Standards for School Leaders. Based upon this self-assessment, each student then designs a professional development action plan which will guide the course of study through the two years of the graduate program and for five years afterward. Leadership goals in each of the program's theme areas, based on the perceived strengths and challenges in the student's self-assessment, are the content of each action plan. The student's university advisor, the course professor, the district mentor, and colleagues in the cohort collaborate with the student in the design and revision of this action plan each semester. The action plan becomes the guiding document or index for the Tier 2 portfolio.

The second course (285A) teaches students the principles of coaching and mentoring which will constitute their field work for each semester of the program. The second section of the portfolio is a peer coaching and mentoring log and reflective journal of learning from those experiences outside of class. Reflection on the value of a professional district mentor, regular meetings, and

the mentor's championing the student for emerging district leadership is the context of the journal. A mentor can promote a student's career by appointing the student to district committees, inviting the student to invitation-only conferences, and by introducing the student as the mentor's protégé. The peer coaching journal helps the student reflect on visiting another school regularly, shadowing a peer professional, and systematically problem solving with the peer professional.

The third course (275A) introduces the data collection and problem solving project for successful schools: the action research project. This is almost like a mini-dissertation and involves problem statement, statistical background, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, review of the literature, research findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Students begin the project in this course and present their findings in the capstone course (275D) at the end of the two year program. Regular meetings with the mentor and advisor and periodic reports to colleagues in the support group provide on-going stimulus to the action research project. The written presentation of the action research project forms a major part of the final portfolio.

The fourth course in the Tier 2 sequence (275B) is the major work of the program, providing an in-depth study of change theory, managing transitions, initiating innovation, institutionalizing change, and sustaining change. The focus is tied to the change matrix or innovation configuration which each student designs to benchmark a change or innovative program in the school. Students learn to closely couple staff and program evaluation to the management of change in schools. The innovation configuration (change matrix) and the reflective writing on change form one part of the portfolio and demonstrate competency in one of the four theme areas: managing and leading change.

The fifth course (275C) deals with social-economic and cultural diversity, one of the major issues in California's school population where whites are no longer the majority and where all subgroups of students are now "minorities." The course deals with racial and class discrimination and the personal journeys of leaders who must change minds, attitudes, and systemic reform of school practices. Heavy reading and discussion form the core of the course. The major connection to the portfolio is reflection on the readings and discussion and evidence that the student has engaged in building equity in diverse communities. The exhibition or evidence in the portfolio is difficult for this part. Displaying an agenda for a community task force in a bilingual school is not enough. Evidence of real efforts to build equity in diverse communities is hard to come by.

The last course (275D) in the sequence for the two year graduate program deals with the politics of education. Instead of heavy reading, the course presents political leaders from diverse school districts and presents a challenge

to students to become politically active in district and state policy making. Again the major contribution to the portfolio is reflective writing on political involvement. The student may present evidence of competency in the form of district committees or task forces, state policy conferences, or involvement in local community political action.

The concluding part of the portfolio for Tier 2 students is an evaluation of the SJSU program in relation to the reality of practical application in 21st century schools.

Since the student has been working with the professors in each course, the SJSU advisor, the district mentor, and the colleagues in the cohort all during the two year program, the final presentation of the portfolio is not as dreadful as an oral defense at the doctoral level. If the student has done the work, the collaborative learning group which supports the student will have no surprises at the final presentation. The concluding meeting where the student presents the portfolio gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate competency with evidence in writing, to plan an agenda, and to demonstrate mastery of technology. Many compare this final assessment – the presentation of the portfolio – to the principal's first presentation to a district board of trustees. It is the student's chance to shine, and the great majority of them are outstanding.

Major Concepts or themes

Major Concepts or Themes of the Program:

Administrative Concepts and Management Strategies
Role of Schooling In A Democratic Society
Building Equity In Diverse Communities
Managing and Leading Change
Research and Reflection On Practice

TIER 1 PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Purpose:
To give each candidate an opportunity to tell us about her/his emerging growth as an educational leader, and
To demonstrate progression in learning and applying leadership skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

Each candidate must demonstrate an acceptable level of accomplishment in each of the following:
Educational leadership
Organizational management

Instructional program
Management of schools
Human resource administration
Fiscal resource and business services administration
Legal and regulatory applications
Policy and political influence
School-community collaborations
Use of technology

TIER 2 PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Definition: The Tier 2 Portfolio is the demonstration of competency for the Professional Services Credential. The candidate will meet with her/his SJSU advisor and district mentor at least two months before the final presentation to discuss the candidate's display of competence. One month before completion of Tier 2, candidates will formally present the portfolio to the SJSU advisor, the district mentor, and the work supervisor.

Organization of the Final Portfolio:

Portfolio materials will be organized into a loose leaf binder with the following tabs, reflections, and examples:
1. A cover sheet for official purposes including your name, position title, work site, work address, phone number and e mail address. The district mentor's name, work address, work phone number, and e mail address will also be included on the cover sheet.
2. A current, brief resume.
3. Your current working Professional Development Action Plan (PDAP) for Tier 2 listing your leadership goals. You should have goals in each of the five theme areas of the Tier 2 program:
Administrative Concepts and Management Strategies
Role Of Schooling In A Democratic Society
Building Equity In Diverse Communities
Managing and Leading Change
Research and Reflection On Practice

4. A completed copy of the "21st Century School Administrator Skills: Self-Assessment for Instructional Leaders" which assesses your leadership skills at the beginning and at the end of Tier 2.
5. A two page reflection on what this assessment instrument means to you. You may also include information from the Situational Leadership LBII Inventory.
One index tab each for the five themes of the Tier 2 program and behind each index tab, include specific evidence of your competency:
7. Administrative Concepts and Management Strategies

A 2 page reflection on skills in administration and management you have learned in Tier 2: refer to classes, readings, and simulations
At least 3 pieces of evidence from your work at school which demonstrate your leadership in this area

8.Role Of Schooling In A Democratic Society

A two page reflection on skills in group process and democratic decision making which you have learned in Tier 2: refer to classes, readings, and simulations.
At least 3 pieces of evidence showing your use of group process and democratic decision making at your work site.

9.Building Equity In Diverse Communities

A two page reflection on skills in equity and diversity which you have learned in Tier 2: refer to classes, readings, and simulations.
At least 3 pieces of evidence showing your work in equity and diversity from your worksite.

10.Managing and Leading Change

A two page reflection on how you have managed and led change and transition which you have learned in Tier 2: refer to classes, readings, simulations, and your change matrix.
At least 3 pieces of evidence showing you leading and managing change and transitions from your work site. Some evidence can be an extension and in-depth explanation of your change matrix.

11.Research and Reflection On Practice

A copy of your completed Action Research project
Peer Coaching Log and Reflection; Mentor Log and Reflection; 30 non-university hours log , relation to PDAP, and reflection
A 2 page reflection on how research and reflective writing have improved your leadership skills.

12.Your future PDAP for the next 2 years after you finish the Tier 2 program (required by CTC).

13.A two page reflective evaluation of the Tier 2 program.

14.Make another copy of each of the following items which will be filed in your permanent folder at SJSU:

Cover page
Current resume
Completed PDAP
Future PDAP
Peer Coaching/Mentor/30 hours log and reflection
Written evaluation of the Tier 2 program.

15.After you have presented your completed portfolio (evidence of competency) in a formal meeting with your SJSU advisor, your district mentor, and your work supervisor, your SJSU advisor will sign off on your demonstration of competency. You will then hand in the 5 duplicate items required for your permanent folder at SJSU

Final Words

We will continue to evaluate and graduate students by portfolio. Returning to traditional final exams or comprehensive master's exams for educational leadership is unlikely. The use of the portfolio for the final assessment of student competency in educational leadership provides three learning experiences that cannot be matched with a final written comprehensive examination:

- a completely individualized course of study,
- evidence of student growth and development in student thinking in coupling theory to practice, and
- evidence of competency in reflective writing and application level of standards and best practice.

The portfolio assessment provides the Educational Leadership faculty with evidence of on-going assessment of the program itself, courses, methods of teaching, and designed learning experiences. We can review portfolios each year to measure how successful we have been in the vision and goals for our master's program. Students benefit from constructing a portfolio of their learning because it forces them to think constructively, to tie theory to practice, to individualize their learning based on self-assessment which comes from standards, and to demonstrate their excellence by their selection of evidence and their reflective writing. Many use the portfolio immediately for job applications, promotions, and demonstration to work supervisors and superintendents.

What have we learned from the current two year cycle of assessment and portfolio presentation? We have learned to be modernize our themes, so we have five new themes more attuned to California's diversity. We have learned to be more specific about the components of the portfolio for 500 students, seven tenure track faculty, and eight field work supervisors. We have learned 1) to fine tune our themes to be more reflective of California's diversity; 2) to be more specific about the evaluative criteria for excellence for that wide variety of students, faculty, and advisors; and 3) that if everything is specific and in writing, it is easier to design standards and to individualize student courses of study based on their self-assessment.

Just as our students do self-assessment as part of their portfolio assessment, we also continually assess the program and the evaluation procedures we use.

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